Dostoevsky's Development of the Character of Prince Myshkin, Hero of The Idiot

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Thesis

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Topical Outline

Introduction

It is the purpose of this essay to study the development of the character of Prince Myshkin, hero of The Idiot, and, in order to accomplish this aim, to analyze Dostoevsky's religio-philosophic dialectic, as it appears in his novels, in conjunction with the degree of positive expression found in this particular novel-drama.

To do this it will be helpful to determine the major influences in Dostoevsky's life and their bearing on the trend of his religious thinking, as well as to study the expression he gives to these ideas in his works and to make some attempt at evaluating his philosophy.

Chapter I

The Formative Influences of Dostoevsky's Life

"The one thing is--love thy neighbor as thyself--that is the one thing. That is all, nothing else is needed. You will instantly find how to live."[1] Here, in these few lines taken from his Journal we have the central theme of all Dostoevsky's writings. It is this spirit of compassionate love which permeates his entire creation. This intense insight it was which led him to probe the soul of his fellow-man. He searched deep into the heart of the sinner not that he might point the accusing finger, but that therein he might find the image of God. Perhaps it was as a result of his katorga experience, as a result of his years of existence in a state hovering between non-living life and unburied death that he came so clearly to penetrate the divine essence of man's nature. Speaking of his fellows in this enforced confinement, he says: "Sometimes one would know a man for years in prison and despise him and think that he was not a human being but a brute. And suddenly a moment will come by chance when his soul will suddenly reveal itself in an involuntary outburst, and you see in it such wealth, such feeling, such heart, such a vivid understanding of its own suffering, and of the suffering of others that your eyes are opened and for the first moment you can't believe what

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1 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Dream of a Queer Fellow, p.30.

you have seen and heard yourself."2 He was always the fellow-sinner, the fellow-sufferer, and, bearing the sorrow equally, he too sought light through repentance. That was his great insight. When Father Zossima says: "All things are atoned for, all things are saved by love. If I, a sinner, even as you are, am tender with you and have pity on you, how much more will God. Love is such a priceless treasure that you can redeem the whole world by it and expiate not only your own sins but the sins of others,"3 it is Dostoevsky himself who speaks to us.

Such a "priceless treasure" of love is not the gift of every man; it is in the terrible and tragic events of Fyodor Dostoevsky's life that we must seek for an understanding of this highly sensitized spirit. His very beginnings were among circumstances which, while they argued ill for personal happiness, seem at the same time most aptly suited to the man who was to become the "poet of the pathological underworld."4. He was born amid conditions of sordidness and filth in a hospital for the Moscow poor. Lest this circumstance should bring misleading inferences regarding the Dostoevsky family background, let me hasten to add that here we find merely a trick of fate. In actuality the family belonged to the lower strata of the Russian upper class and, while not wealthy, were comfortably situated. The unsavory

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2 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The House of the Dead , p. 240.

3 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, p. 58.

4 Lavrin, Janko: Dostoevsky and His Creation--A Psycho-Critical Study, p. 3.

location is explained by the fact that the father was at that time serving as a physician in this hospital. At this point another rather interesting factor enters the picture, one which played a determining part in the boy's development. Meier-Graefe states quite definitely that "epilepsy was laid in his cradle by a dypsomaniac father."[5] Other biographers, by-passing this point, however, stress rather the stern religious atmosphere of the home during Dostoevsky's boyhood. May we then accept both of these somewhat contradictory features as true?

A picture of a home life militarily strict in its discipline comes to mind as we think of Dostoevsky's boyhood. We see the father coldly and efficiently supervising the lessons of his children in an atmosphere of impersonality. Of the nature of this early life and of its effects upon his later years Soloviev says Dostoevsky was an "impressionable, prematurely disheartened, and ailing lad--. From earliest childhood, therefore, Dostoevsky fell into the way of shrinking from life; from earliest childhood there appeared in him that diffident, suspicious attitude towards himself and others which ended by wrecking his life."[6] How truly did the man himself live in his creation!

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5 Meier-Graefe, Julius, Dostoevsky, The Man and His Work, p. 31.

6 Soloviev, Eugenii: Dostoevsky--His Life and Literary Activity, p. 58.

It is to the brief summer holidays in the Tula that we must look for the moments of greatest happiness. Here, living close to the Russian earth which he loved as a living soul, Dostoevsky came to know the heart of the Russian peasant. In the unlearned, often brutal, spirit of the peasant he found the intense compassion of the Russian people, which he has interpreted as a great leaning toward a messianic destiny. In later years in the pages of his Journal Dostoevsky tells us of an incident of this period which remained vividly impressed upon his memory even during his days of Siberian imprisonment. As a child he had frequently been subject to hallucinations, and it was just such an experience which led to the following incident. He had been wandering along in the fields near a ravine by the edge of the woods. Beyond the bushes in which he stopped to rest a muzhik was trudging along the field; suddenly through the clear air there came to the boy's ears, and to his ears alone,a piercing shriek of "Wolf." Clutched by unspeakable terror, and almost failing in the attempt, the boy ran to the muzhik and, clasping his long white blouse, repeated the cry-- "whereupon with an uneasy smile, and a shake of his head which clearly bespoke concern and anxiety on my account, he looked at me and said: 'Go along, you, for being frightened! There, there, little one! Come, come!' And he put out his hand, and stroked my cheek. 'Have done, have done!'he repeated, 'and may Christ have

you in His charge!'" But still the terrorized child trembled, "and this seemed to make an impression upon him, for once again he extended a massive, black-nailed, earth-encrusted finger, and gently, very gently, touched my quivering lips. And as he did so he smiled, a sort of lingering, motherly smile."[7] Here in the compassion of the peasant was, for Dostoevsky, the essence of the Russian soul. These moments he carried with him throughout life.

In 1837 Dostoevsky went off to Petrograd, the city of the "white nights," to study at the College of Engineering. Here a barrier sprung up between the boy and his proposed comrades who were both wealthier than he and less mentally developed than he. Soon Dostoevsky found himself alone, the dreamer of the White Nights. The great vistas of literature opened out before him and, like his fellows of the mountain peak, he read voluminously, swaying with the vast tide of the inflowing currents. Petrograd, the dull, official city, was no more. Beneath the steely surface he now saw the mystical, interesting, unique, pathologic life within. He read much: of the French and German classics; of the photographic realism of Balzac, which later led to his own "Russian realism," perhaps most strongly impressed upon us in certain scenes of Crime and Punishment; of the romantic sentimentalism of Schiller, revealed in such early works as Poor Folk and The Insulted and Injured. Perhaps the most

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7 Soloviev, op. cit., p. 45.

important literary influence at this time, however, was the work of George Sand. She was at this time turning from her early spirit of romanticism to an absorbing interest in socialism which was with her finding expression in Christian humanism. She "based her convictions, her hopes, and her ideals upon the moral sense of man--upon his spiritual hunger, upon his yearning for perfection and purity--rather than upon any theory of ant-like compulsion. In other words, she cherished an unconditional belief in the human personality, to the point of its being immortal, and ever upheld and diffused her theory of personal freedom."[8] It is just this emphasis upon personal freedom and this rejection of all Socialist Utopias, because they are all inextricably intertwined with the fallacy of ant-like compulsion, which we see repeated again and again throughout the work of Dostoevsky.

Following his term at college, he went into the government. It was at this time that Dostoevsky, writing an almost completely Schilleresque novel, first attracted the attention of the Petersburg literary circle and, in particular, the notice of the famed critic, Bielinsky, who praised him highly. The novel was Poor Folk, a story in the form of letters, telling of the love of a poor orphan-girl and a shy, half-starved Petersburg clerk. Here for the first time was Dostoevsky's handling of his all-absorbing subject; his characters were drawn from among the insulted and injured.

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8 Soloviev, op. cit., p. 66.

The rapid success gained by this novel, added to his instantaneous popularity and the rich praise of the critics, all combined to turn his head. The joys of authorship and fame were not to last long, however, for the second long story, The Double, was a failure. The only comment of the critic Bielinsky, one which, by the way, would seem to highlight his lack of discernment, was "pathological nonsense." Yet here we find the beginnings of Dostoevsky's great analytical powers, of his interest in the inner workings of the mind, of his study of the psychology of the abnormal. Later critics, recognizing its worth, have dealt more kindly with this tale of the minor Petersburg clerk of meek manners and self-assertive aspirations who suddenly saw his self-willed dreams of domination take outward form in another identity. Speaking of the schizophrenic of The Double, Meier-Graefe says: ". . . only a fantastic second sight could discover the unity underlying the demoniac man."[10]

Even in his dreams Mr. Golyadkin Senior, the original, carries about with him this twin image of himself; always there is present the brutal desire of one to triumph over the other, to prove himself the one and only. Mr. Golyadkin, senior, has been dreaming, peacefully, happily. He is in society; he has attained to all the social graces which in life he lacks. He is acclaimed; he is smiled upon;

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10 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky-The Man and His Work, p. 48.

he is noted as a wit, as a gentleman. Suddenly there appears the other Mr. Golyadkin, the imposter. All is reversed; the world turns black and foul in a moment. "By his very appearance on the scene, Mr. Golyadkin, junior, destroyed the whole triumph and glory of Mr. Golyadkin senior, eclipsed Mr. Golyadkin senior; trampled him in the mud, and, at last, proved clearly that Golyadkin senior--that is, the genuine one--was not the genuine one at all but the sham, and that he, Goyadkin junior, was the real one; that, in fact, Mr. Golyadkin senior was not at all what he appeared to be but something very disgraceful, and that consequently he had no right to mix in the society of honorable and well-bred people."[11]

So we have the double man. But suddenly Dostoevsky's career as a novelist was ended, or rather he himself entered upon those experiences of his life which were to lead to his greatest fulfillment as a novelist. The exact extent of Dostoevsky's socialistic affiliations and activities still seems to be a matter of doubt. If we accept Mrs. Garnett's view, it was merely a poor benighted spectator at a revolutionist meeting who was picked up by the Czarist police.[12] On the other hand, Professor Purinton quotes E. J. Simmons to the effect that, although Dostoevsky had been brought up most strictly in the Russian Orthodox Church, by

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11 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Double, p. 23.

12 Garnett, Constance: Introduction to Dostoevsky; The Idiot.

the time he had attained early manhood, he, like many other young men of his age, had lost his childhood faith and had accepted a completely atheistic and materialistic philosophy On the eve of his banishment he is believed to have been a member of the Durov Circle, the inner seven of the Petrashevsky Group, of which Speshnev, the leader, later served as the prototype of Stravroguin in The Possessed. It was Petrashevsky who summed up the materialistic views of the group when he stated that "Christ was a well-known demagogue who had ended his career somewhat unsuccessfully."[13] Considering these latter factors, we may view the years in the katorga as a rebirth experience of manifold value. Meier-Graefe tells us that "without the dead house there would have been no Dostoevsky."[14] In his letters to his brother, Dostoevsky plainly shows that he himself clearly realized this, for he writes begging his brother not to worry, telling him of his spiritual happiness, and trying to impress upon him his sincere thankfulness to the Czar for this term of servitude.

The original verdict of the court had been death for the socialist offenders; but an interesting instance of Russian justice may be observed in this connection. On the morning of the proposed execution the six men were taken out to the prison courtyard, blindfolded, and sent before the

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13 Religion in Life, Winter 1946-47, Purinton, Carl: The Christ Image in the Novels of Dostoevsky, p. 43.

14 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 42.

firing squad. They were to be shot in groups of three; Dostoevsky was scheduled to stand up in the second group. The men parted from each other. The first three took their places. The muskets were raised. No report sounded. Instead a message arrived from the Czar. The sentence was transmitted. Siberia replaced death. The incident had been so planned. One of the men went mad on the instant; yet Dostoevsky says that he himself was not greatly affected by this happening, but he belies this comment by his passionate outcry, "No, you can't treat a man like that!"[15] in referring to the horror of this experience years later in the pages of The Idiot.

There followed then seven years in Siberia--both in penal servitude and, later, in the Russian battalion stationed in Siberia, before this political prisoner was allowed to return. The only reading matter which Dostoevsky had during all this time was a small copy of the New Testament given to him by the wife of a Decembrist plotter. That was all that was permitted. If we view this fact in the light of his supposed previous falling away from Greek Orthodoxy and of his later religious dialectic, it assumes almost prime importance in the development of his religio-philosophic views. Of the first four years--those passed at hard labor in company with the convicts--Dostoevsky has left us one of the greatest autobiographical records of lit-

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15 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 21.

erature in his House of the Dead. Here, he came to look upon all men, sinners and sufferers alike, objectively; here, he recognized the impossibility of pinning the labels "good" and "evil" upon the characters of men. Nowhere had he, or could he have, viewed the proximity of such outwardly diametrically opposed characteristics in so rich and varied an array as here in Siberia. Thus, while he found constant evidences of outrageous treatment of their fellows, he also found that no prisoners sought to outrage God. Neither were there any atheists. Man, battling for his primal freedom, the age-long inheritance, was aided in the struggle by his basic religious instincts. However, social division still existed. The peasant prisoners, who formed the vast bulk of the penal colony, hesitated to accept the convict of noble blood. He was an outsider and he was regarded with suspicion; class barriers persisted. While it is true that this condition made Dostoevsky's life more difficult and while he does refer to it in his writing, it was not this fact which he found most trying. Casting aside such considerations as the loss of personal freedom and the forced labor, he said: "there is another torture in prison life almost more terrible than any other--that is compulsory life in common."[16] Never, never for a moment in four years was the prisoner alone.

Despite these enforced difficulties of this new

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16 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The House of the Dead, p. 20.

mode of life and despite the frequently repulsive brute nature of many of his fellows, Dostoevsky's intuitive sympathies were strong enough and sensitive enough to discover and love the common humanity of his fellows. He was able to comprehend the vast breadth of man's nature, to understand that man with "the ideal of Sodom in his heart might still retain the vision of the Madonna." He was not lost in amoral fallacies, but he saw that in nature we find only mixtures. This knowledge he later applied to his creation. The same action may be the deed of many men of apparently vastly differing natures. Thus, "Ivan or Dmitri might murder just as well as Smerdyakov."[17]

Throughout his House of the Dead we find this constant mingling of the hideously brutal and repulsive with the most childishly naive and charming. Our minds are at once swayed by sympathy with the delightful and repelled by horror of the ugly. Thus, he tells of "stories of the most terrible, the most unnatural actions, of the most monstrous murders told with the most spontaneous, childishly merry laughter."[18] Yet these incidents are not told to reveal the callous nature of these men. To Dostoevsky this was not the most striking feature. He records these moments to bring before his reader's mind in all the garrish emphasis of its disharmonious colors the intense duality of man's nature.

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17 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky-The Man and His Work, p. 31.
18 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The House of the Dead, p. 13.

It was after his release from penal servitude, but while he was yet forced to remain in Siberia that Dostoevsky contracted his unfortunate first marriage with Madame Issayev. The importance of this short-lived relationship with the former wife of a Siberian officer is not to be greatly stressed. The native characters of both were incompatible from the first. It is significant only in the further light which it throws upon Dostoevsky's character both with regard to the sympathy shown to his emotionally immature wife, although he was by nature passionate and jealous, and with regard to the extreme tenderness later shown to the stepson who remained with him. This love story is noteworthy chiefly for the material it supplied for his creative writing; Dostoevsky finally stepping from the scene in favor of a rival as did the hero of his White Nights.

Before leaving the Siberian period of the novelist's life, there is one other factor of paramount importance which must be noted. It was during the penal servitude that the evidence of the "Sacred disease," epilepsy, began to be visible. Whether this was the beginning or whether it was merely the aggravation of an inborn tendency is of no value for discussion here. It is epilepsy which casts its influence over all of his later work. In his minute study of the effects of this disease on the mind of man Dostoevsky excelled. Again and again he drew his creation from the depths of his frenzied visions. In many of his novels the

typical epileptic appears; it is Nellie in The Insulted and Injured, Prince Myshkin in The Idiot, Kirillow in The Possessed, and Smerdyakov in The Brothers Karamazov. He was interested in the mystical not the clinical side of the disease. For him the brief moments of extreme lucidity before the fits were "flashes of a profoundest ecstasy and intuitive insight into a higher truth."[19] In his own mind as well as in the consciousness of his characters there was always the tense, unanswered question: Have these flashes of "higher harmony" an objective value or are they merely subjective self-delusions?

Probably the final important influence in his life necessary to an understanding of his writings, is the self-enforced exile from Russia. Following the deaths of his wife and his brother and the bankruptcy of the journal, Epocha, Dostoevsky found it necessary to go abroad. This first trip was fairly brief, however, and is worthy of comment chiefly in that it was at this time that his gambling mania developed, thus bringing him a knowledge of this manner of life which stood him in good stead when he wrote The Gambler. The later trip to Western Europe, a four-year long vagabondage, undertaken with his second wife, Anna Grigorevna, is of far greater importance in its influence upon his thinking. A true Russian, deeply imbued with a fierce love for his native

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19 Lavrin, Janko: Dostoevsky and His Creation: A Psycho-Critical Study, p. 16.

soil, Dostoevsky, although not so narrowly nationalistic as to be a Slavophil (there is some dispute on this point among various critics), could see in Western Europe only a "dearly beloved graveyard." His intense longing for Russia, his sorrow at the death of his infant daughter, Sonia, his increased nervous condition caused by the constant recurrence of terrible attacks of epilepsy, and his strong aversion to the self-complacent bourgeois spirit which he found manifest everywhere about him; all converged to make this a period of growing inner doubts and torments.

These were the mental conflicts which led to the writing of his greatest and most positive works: The Idiot (1868, '69) and The Brothers Karamazov (1879, '80). "The problem of Europe and Russia gradually extended itself in Dostoevsky's mind till it embraced those profound ethical, social, and religious aspects with which his works now become permeated."[20] In the Grand Inquisitor's self-knowledge of his own basically false position, in the faith and hope of the boy, Alyosha, and in the dying words of the Elder Zossima, we have the final teachings of the mature Dostoevsky. As in the days of the Dream of a Queer Fellow, his vision was still one of love. In the chapters of The Russian Monk[21] he has written what he considered his great hosanna of faith. It is a fervent, joyful hymn of religious ecstasy and devotion:

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20 Lavrin, op. cit., p. 24.
21 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brother Karamazov, Book VI.

"Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better everyday and you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love."[22]

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22 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brother Karamazov, p.383.

Chapter II

The Expression of Dostoevsky's Mature Philosophy

The Russian Monk

If we take this view that compassionating love is central to Dostoevsky's concept of world harmony, we are faced with the need for reconciling this thesis with his rejection of the apparently sincere love for humanity expressed by such men as Versilov[1] and Ivan Karamazov. This is more easily explained, however, in the light of the other essential elements of Dostoevsky's philosophy. His view of man was based upon a consideration of man in his relation to God. This concept involved the idea of man as an immortal being possessing absolute, not relative, value. So, in this light, the place of suffering and of injustice in the universe becomes no longer so impossible of justification as it appears to Ivan. Man, the immortal and rational being, is placed under the burden of freedom as a necessary attribute of his spiritual dignity and the obvious result of this is choice of evil as well as choice of good. From this terrible burden Dostoevsky would not seek to free him, for Dostoevsky's love for humanity is so bound up with respect for the value of personality that in any attempt to relieve man of his freedom, he sees merely the reduction of man to a lower level. On this ground he based his intense and biased hatred of

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1 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: A Raw Youth.

both Catholicism and socialism. Seeing in each the element of authoritarianism, he repudiated each completely.

That this very struggle between a deep love for humanity and an inability to accept God's universe in terms of man's freedom and the inevitable injustice attendant upon it should find its most passionate and enduring expression in the speeches of Ivan, the dualistic, tormented soul who is frequently considered Dostoevsky's mouthpiece, is an excellent indication of the duality of Dostoevsky's own personality. Ivan gives the clearest and most compact statement of the evils attendant upon this rejection of freedom and of the self-deification which is the result of this, when in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor he says: "They will marvel at us and look on us as gods, because we are ready to endure the freedom which they have found so dreadful, and to rule over them--so awful it will seem to them to be free."[2]

Such a thesis, which rejects man the immortal being having absolute value, is by its very nature atheistic. This is exactly the stand which Raskolnikov takes, when, in his warped love for his fellows and in his self-deceiving desire to aid them, he considered man as of relative value and proceeded to "kill an insect." This same lack of faith is the Grand Inquisitor's great and terrible secret. He realizes

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2 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, p. 30.

that his religion, founded upon "miracle, mystery, and authority," follows the teachings of the "other one," accepts the three temptations of the wilderness. Thus, he rebukes the Prisoner with the words:

> "Why hast thou come now to hinder us? And why dost thou look silently and searchingly at me with thy mild eyes? Be angry. I don't want thy love, for I love thee not."[3]

Here the intense inner struggle is seen at its highest point; an all-encompassing, sacrificial love of man ("we shall plan the universal happiness of man"), a love which on its own level is sincere; combined with a bitter, self-lacerating cynicism and utter lack of faith in God, which, of course, finds its ultimate expression in rejection of man as man. Although Dostoevsky takes his stand with the silent figure of Christ, and although he rejects the specious works of the Grand Inquisitor through the words of Alyosha, and later through the more elaborated teachings of the Elder Zossima, yet the very fact that we find these doubts continually expressed throughout his novels, even unto his last work, which is generally considered to be the final expression of his beliefs, would seem to indicate that Dostoevsky's earlier doubts were not yet resolved. That Dostoevsky's final word on this subject comes from the Elder Zossima rather than from Ivan indicates, at least, the

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3 Ibid, p. 305.

general upward trend of his thinking. Thus, the concluding effect is positive rather than negative.

It is somewhat a matter of interest and surprise that Dostoevsky who saw the evils of "miracle, mystery, and authority" so clearly manifested in both Roman Catholicism and socialism should, at the very moment when Tolstoy was at such odds with the Russian Orthodox Church on these very grounds, have submitted his own thinking so entirely to this same teaching. Was he, indeed, so blind to the very evidences of miracle, mystery, and especially authority to be found therein? This seeming impossibility is apparently the truth. Perhaps this submissive faith gains in reason and meaning when we consider it in the light of his earlier rejection of Christianity and of what might be called his spiritual regeneration during his katorga experience.

The Grand Inquisitor illustrates Dostoevsky's philosophy by presenting the elements which it negates; whereas the Russian monk evolves his thinking in all its most positive aspects. A close study of this teaching which consummates all Dostoevsky's beliefs and which he himself spent so long in preparing in its present form, will perhaps best enable us to understand the ideals at which he was aiming in The Idiot and to evaluate the relative worth of his presentation there in its just proportion.

Of Dostoevsky's three attempts to embody various aspects of the Christ image (Myshkin, Alyosha, and Zossima),

the figure of Zossima is perhaps the most positively presented, for here we have a fully-rounded personage tied securely to earthly life as well as to spiritual reality. In regarding each of the other figures the reader's vision is partially clouded; the man is set off apart from the rest of humanity; thus he can reveal only certain limited aspects of the Christ-image. Prince Myshkin, with his enfeebled body, his clear-seeing but weakened mind; and his unworldly spiritual nature molded in years of retirement is, it is true, a "positively good man," but here arises the question of the value of the goodness of a man for whom the possibility of choice is limited. For Dostoevsky in creating the character of Prince Myshkin, has, to a certain extent, defeated his own thesis of freedom as opposed to necessity, because of the special conditions imposed upon him; for Prince Myshkin there can be only, to use Berdyaev's terminology, a "good necessity."

In Alyosha, to consider another representative of this type, we have a character who has inherent within himself all the elements and possibilities of Karamazov baseness and sensuality as well as a highly sensitized spiritual nature. Here again, however, Dostoevsky has placed a boundary upon the character development, for Alyosha is but a boy, incompletely conceived and delineated as yet. His particular religiosity and spiritual conviction, while deep and sincere, are not, as he is here presented, the result of personal

suffering and religion experience, but simply an intuitive faith conceived and accepted through love. In considering and criticizing the character of Alyosha, it must be remembered, however, that in this case the sense of incompletion was purposely cultivated in the present novel, The Brothers Karamazov, with the aim of further expanding and elaborating this figure in the long-projected but never-written novel, The Life of a Great Sinner, so that here we have not the entire picture before us.

In the Elder Zossima, on the contrary, we have a study of a man whose religious philosophy is based upon personal experience of sin and suffering and upon an intense and sincere conviction of the deep truth of his own spiritual revelation. From this point of view the teachings of this monk assume the greatest importance in any attempt to determine the positive side of Dostoevsky's own philosophy.

The Russian Monk was originally conceived as a refutation of the arguments propounded by Ivan in Pro and Contra; yet, while Zossima presents his case along parallel lines, he does not actually formulate answers to the questions raised by Ivan, perhaps because for him they do not exist. His actual sermon, which forms but a very small portion of this book, is presented as a consummation of a life which has in itself been a living sermon.[4]

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4 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, Book VI, The Russian Monk.

Drawing his conclusions from his own experience and idealizing this in accordance with his own spiritual nature, Zossima presents a picture of the Russian monk as the embodiment of loving humility. He follows the Biblical phrase: Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. These are the meek who in the quiet of the cloisters are preparing for the great task of salvation which lies ahead. To their aid will come the great mass of the people, the peasants. Their submission is the true submission of the meek, submission having its foundation in spiritual dignity. For the people have strength and can never be fully turned aside by atheistic leaders, but will respond always to humble love and faith. Thus, the salvation of Russia, in this view, is to come through the humility, faith, and love of the people--the traits of the meek.

Humble love once attained brings with it the kingdom of God, for this universal harmony is dependant upon the unification of the warring elements within the individual. Without faith in God nothing is possible for without faith there is no ideal of goodness, there is no meaning in crime. But for him this faith is so basically a part of his nature that he cannot actually conceive of the possibility of so vain a reality. So he passes over this point and stresses once more his conviction that salvation will come from the faith and meekness of the people. This submission will eventually lead to equality which is to be found only in the

spiritual dignity of man. Equality, for Zossima, cannot be brought about by an atheistic-socialistic planning which, regardless of its humanitarian motives, will, in his view, result only in the loss of man's freedom and dignity, in all being equalized in degradation as corruption spreads down to the peasant from above. Thus, it is possible only in the Christian sense in which master and servant, unified in love, are brothers in the spirit. This leads him to believe that from the position of the peasant such equality already exists, for, by the very fact that the individual peasant may respect his master without envy, he proves his spiritual dignity as a man; so Zossima's counsel is rather for the masters than the masses, that they may so act that the servant may be freer in spirit than if he were not a servant. With the fulfillment of these conditions he looks ahead to the days when man will find his joy only in deeds of light and mercy and when the Russian people will shine forth in the world as a light to the nations.

Closely allied with faith in God is, of course, communion with God. The greatest stress is placed upon prayer as an ecstatic and regenerating experience which brings man closer to God and his fellows in a union of love. It is this overflowing joy of the heart in prayer, in contact with God, which will eventually lead to world harmony through love, love of man as an immortal being, and finally to love of man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of

Divine love and is the highest love on earth. Humble love, the only weapon allowed to the meek, the weapon which is so marvelously strong, is to be the only means of opposing sin. At its highest and best expression this loving humility becomes actively benevolent love, all-compassionating, all-comprising which leads man to make himself responsible for all men's sins, to identify his own well-being with the well-being of all men.

Once men have attained to this unification in the spirit, they must recognize the impossibility of judging their fellows. Taking the view that all are sinners equally and that none may judge, each man will seek to take the crime upon himself rather, suffer for the criminal, and let him go without reproach. Should the sinner laugh and mock, yet must this course be held; for, though his time is not yet come, another will suffer and judge and condemn himself, and God's truth will be fulfilled. In this world view even the sinner may find cause for rejoicing for in the fact that there are others who are righteous and sinless he may seek joy and comfort. If, on the other hand, man lives as the meek should, but can witness no fruit of his works, let him not despair, but strengthen his faith always and remember that "men are always saved after the death of the deliverer."[5]

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5 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, p.386.

Divine love was is the natural love on earth. Impale love, the only weapon allowed to this user, the weapon which is marvelously strong, is to be the only weapon of operation. At the highest and best expression this loving humility centered actively benevolent love, all-compassionating, all-comprehending which leads man to make himself responsible for all man's sins, to identify his own well-being with the well-being of all men.

Once men have attained to this unification in the spirit, they must recognize the impossibility of imposing their beliefs. Taking the view that all are children equally and that none may judge, each man will seek to have his action upon directly reason, suffer for the criminal, but let him go without re-hate. Should the sinner laugh and scoff, yet must this course be held; for, though his time is not yet come, suffer will suffer and judge and condemn himself, and God's truth will be fulfilled. In this world view even the sinner may find a place for rejoicing for in the fact that there are others who are righteous and sinless he may seek joy and comfort. It, on the other hand, such likewise two meet should, not can witness to truth of his words, let him not despair, but strengthen his faith always and remember that "men are always saved after the death of the destroyer."[5]

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5 Dostoevsky, Tyrion The Brothers Karamazov, p.365.

The conversations of Father Zossima end with a mystic reflection on hell and hell fire. Here, in these few paragraphs is to be found the flowering of all Dostoevsky's philosophy. In answer to the question, "What is Hell?" Zossima responds, "Hell is the suffering of being unable to love." Earthly life is given so that one may have a moment of active, living love, so that in a moment of time man may say, "I am and I love." To rise up to God without ever having loved, to be brought close to those who have loved when he has despised love, that is hell. After earthly life is over, there is no sacrifice in loving. Spiritual love now burns with fiery thirst, but life can no longer be sacrificed for love. Then would the soul be glad of material agony, but neither can this material agony be attained, nor can the spiritual agony within be resolved and removed, for if the righteous in Paradise attempted to remove the soul's torment, they would but increase the desire to give active love, and therefore increase the torment. At this point Dostoevsky returns to his favorite theme of humility; only here may the tortured soul find some measure of relief. By accepting the love of the righteous and by acknowledging the impossibility of repaying it, by submission and humility, only thus may the soul attain at last to some semblance of the active love which it here despised. Some there are, however, for whom hell is voluntary, who live upon their vindictive pride. These burn in the fire of their own wrath; they yearn for

death and annihilation but they will not attain to death. Thus, with the last words of his hosanna echoing the necessity for humble love, does Dostoevsky close the conversations of the Elder Zossima.

Book VI of The Brothers Karamozov, "The Russian Monk, must stand as the most formal and the final presentation (the Pushkin Memorial address excepted) of Dostoevsky's religious and political views."[6] In the creation of Father Zossima the author has attempted to show that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstraction, but a vivid reality, possible, clearly near at hand."[7] This character begins as one of Dostoevsky's strongly passionate and self-willed doubles and finally evolves into a meek type; yet he differs from the traditional meek characters in that his is a meekness acquired from experiences of life. This is a highly intelligent man who has subdued his nature more completely that the other meek characters; it is a philosopher with a definite ethical and social ideal. In this respect the plan of The Russian Monk strongly resembles the proposed plan of The ~~Russian~~ Life of a Great Sinner. However, neither in his portrayal of this character transition nor in his presentation of the conversations do critics consider Dostoevsky to have been outstandingly successful. Artistically speaking this section lacks

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6 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 377.

7 Ibid., p. 376.

the power and vigor of the section it is intended to refute. This whole book was based upon the teachings of the eighteenth century monk, Tikhon Zadonski. The tone and spirit is a deliberate attempt on Dostoevsky's part to reproduce the air of wise naivete of his conversations. Perhaps it is because of this restraint that this section lacks the power and force of Ivan's relation of his own struggle. For it is generally accepted that through Ivan's lips Dostoevsky is giving expression to his own duality and doubts. Yet, it cannot actually be said that Ivan and Zossima are so far apart. If we compare their words, we find that each is moved by the same great and terrible love not only for man but for all creation:

> "I shall fall on the ground and kiss those stones and weep over them--. And I shall not weep from despair; but simply because I shall be happy in my tears, I shall steep my soul in my emotion. I love the sticky leaves in spring, the blue sky--that's all it is."[8]

Are these words spoken by Ivan so different in tone from the exhortation of Zossima to:

> "Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love. . . . Seek that rapture and ecstasy. Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears."[9]

What then is the truth which Zossima sees and which Ivan cannot find? Zossima sees the work of God in all. Ivan's love is only the strong, almost animal surge, of un-

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8 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, p.274.

9 Ibid., p. 387.

quenchable life which must find expression despite reason, despite cynicism, whereas Zossima's love is pure and deep, without alloy, based on the most abiding faith.

The weakness of Book VI lies, however, largely in the fact that Zossima offers what from the western point of view is considered an unrealistic solution to material problems. His only answer is an exhortation to man to practice the perennial traits of the meek characters--submissiveness and self-perfectability. He takes Job's view of the problem of suffering and bids us wait on the will of Divine Providence. Suffering is accepted and has value, for it "corrects transgression for the sake of the whole for our own good."[10] But Ivan has already forseen and repudiated this solution in his talk with Alyosha. For him human happiness must not be built on unavenged human suffering. Thus while Zossima touches on the problem so intensely central to Ivan's rejection of God's universe, he makes no attempt to answer it, but wisely recognizes that no man can give a conclusive answer; he can only wait. Therefore, many critics, pursued by Ivan's doubts, see Zossima's philosophy as passive not active, conservative to the point of reactionary-ism and leading to stagnation and negation of the whole ideal of progress, "for in reconciling man with all the evil and suffering in the world, Zossima condemns

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10 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevsky--The Making of a Novelist, p. 379.

him to a philosophy of the futility of both body and spirit."[11]

That Dostoevsky himself also recognized the weaknesses inherent in the presentation of the precepts of Father Zossima is evident both from his letters to his friends at this time and from certain passages in his address delivered later that same year (1880) at the unveiling of the Pushkin Memorial where he again returns to the problem of suffering in words almost identical with those with which Ivan questions Alyosha in Pro and Contra, Book V of The Brothers Karamazov. In discussing Tatiana's rejection of Onyegin in Pushkin's Eugène Onyegin, Dostoevsky says:

> "Can you for one moment admit the thought that those for whom the building has been built would agree to receive that happiness from you, if its foundation was suffering, the suffering of an insignificant being perhaps, but one who had been cruelly and unjustly put to death, even if when they had attained that happiness, they should be happy for ever? . . . No, a pure Russian soul decides thus: Let me, let me alone be deprived of happiness. . . but I will not be happy through having ruined another."[12]

What better indication could we have that the intense, almost pathological dualism of Dostoevsky's own nature was still unresolved, despite his earlier so-called "hosanna from the flames of the furnace of doubt."

Yet the final effect of Dostoevsky's teaching is neither confused nor negative. The position which he took is in large measure the direct outcome of the view inculcated

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11 Ibid., p. 382.
12 Pritchard: World's Best Essays, p. 738, Dostoevsky, Fyodor: Unveiling of the Pushkin Memorial.

by the Eastern Orthodox Church, a view which emphasized the value of passive goodness[13] as represented by the earlier concept now somewhat discredited of a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." It is for this reason perhaps that Berdyaev, the Russian Orthodox leader, is able to give us a more positive and sympathetic treatment of Dostoevsky's ideas than are western critics. Even he admits that Dostoevsky never fully attained total unity, never resolved all his own contradictions. The positive aspects which he finds in Dostoevsky are not strictly speaking his emphasis on loving humility but his emphasis on man and on freedom of the will, and thereby only indirectly on humility and love. The view of freedom which Dostoevsky held may in its final stages lead in either of two directions: the deification of man or the discovery of God. But herein lies the great need for love and humility; for it is when man rejects submission and deifies himself, when he allows himself to be subject to the wildest self-will, that he comes at last to a view of man apart from God which is simply a lowering of man. It is this very deification of man, which Dostoevsky believed was to be found in the humanism of western Europe, which led him to reject such teaching as a manifestation of the antichrist. It is for this reason that mingled with his love of man we find, in the last analysis, the acceptance of suffering and

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13 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 215.

cruelty in the world as an essential attribute of man's freedom. So Berdyaev in his interpretation provides an answer to Ivan's bitter outcry against the evidence of injustice in the world:

> "The existence of evil is a proof of the existence of God. If the world consisted wholly and uniquely of goodness and righteousness there would be no need for God, for the world itself would be God. God is because evil is. And that means that God is because freedom is."[14]

Therefore, in Ivan's rejection of freedom we have the basis for his repudiation of God's universe, for the conclusion drawn is inevitable, if we reject freedom, we reject God, or, taking the other view possible, we make God alone responsible for evil, and imply a fundamental dualism in the very nature of God, in either case lessening man's spiritual dignity.

There are, however, three possible solutions offered by which world harmony may be attained:

(1) Without suffering or creative effort, without universal tragedy, and without the freedom to refuse it;

(2) As the peak of earthly history, achieved at the price of the unnumbered sufferings and tears of all the generations that have served only as stepping stones toward it; or

(3) Through freedom and accepted suffering on a plane, so that every man who lives and suffers may attain at

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14 Berdyaev, Nicholas: Dostoievsky--An Interpretation, p. 87.

will by sincere and humble repentance to the kingdom of God.[15] The first is the authoritarian plan which Ivan wished; the second is the statement of the condition on which Ivan refused to accept God's universe; the last is the solution which Dostoevsky regards as most true; man is to find his way to God through suffering and sincere repentance, or as Zossima stated it, through submission and loving humility.

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15 Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 153.

Chapter III

The Development of the Meek Type

Although, as has been pointed out earlier, Dostoevsky realized most fully the impossibility of separating men into types, for "the evil man was also good, the dirty one clean, the fool wise, and avarice revealed aspects which were not suspected in an avaricious man;"[1] yet we do find three fairly well defined character categories within his work. These are the Double, the Meek, and the Self-Willed. The fact that one of these types, and that the most important one and the one most frequently appearing upon the scene, is the Double, the juxtaposition of the self-willed and meek elements in one man, indicates the justness of Meier-Graefe's comment; however; this is so true that even in those characters who may be more definitely classified as either Self-Willed or Meek, we occasionally find evidence of this same duality. Thus Rogozhin is attracted by the pure nature of Prince Myshkin, while the latter cannot completely free himself from doubting thoughts.

The Double was the first of these types to come to life. There is a basic dualism in Devushkin,[2] the outwardly meek clerk of Poor Folk, Dostoevsky's first literary attain-

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1 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 31.

2 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 33.

ment. This is the simple dualism of the suppressed individual who dreams of great power and glory, yet who has no means of accomplishing either. Here, there is not yet the close analysis of this type. That was to wait for the next story, The Double, in which the amazing personality of the schizophrenic was developed and studied at length. Here again we have a meek clerk with commanding aspirations, but this time both natures are given personalized form and a persecution mania is added. The Double is now a clinical case study.

When we come to The Friend of the Family we have in Foma Fomitch a double who realizes his visionary dreams, and "a base soul escaping from oppression becomes an oppressor,"[3] the former buffoon becomes the household tyrant. Here Dostoevsky introduces another basic element of the Double's nature, a warped tendency to seek pleasure in the suffering of oneself and of others. This emotional aspect of dualism is especially manifested in the reaction to love of his great women Doubles, such as Nastasya and Aglaia in The Idiot and Katerina Ivanovina and Lise in The Brothers Karamazov. Prince Myshkin sums up the conflicting desires and aims of these Doubles when, speaking of Nastasya Filipovna, he says:

> "Do you know that a woman is capable of torturing a man with her cruelty and mockery without the faintest

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3 Ibid., p. 88.

> twinge of conscience, because she'll think everytime she looks at you: 'I'm tormenting him to death now, but I'll make up for it with my love, later.'"[4]

Thus love in the Double involves a struggle between pride and submission which finds expression in a sadistic mingling of both love and hate at once. For the Double, the more fiercely he loves, the more fiercely he hates.

In the "underground man" we have another important aspect of the later Doubles added. Here is a highly intellectual and thinking man who is fully aware of his own duality. This figure leads us directly to a Raskolnikov. This character goes one step beyond the "underground man" in that he decides to act. He projects his dualism into society, dividing all men into the weak and the self-willed, and then unsuccessfully attempts to take his place among the Self-Willed. The next figure, Ippolit Terentyev, translates his dualism into a struggle between God and man. This is a minor foreshadowing of Ivan Karamazov. The first explanation of the enigmatic nature of the Double, an explanation which he later repeated in slightly modified form in The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky presents in A Raw Youth:

> "I have marvelled a thousand times at that faculty of man. . . of cherishing in his soul his loftiest ideal side by side with the greatest baseness, and all quite sincerely."[5]

The last of Dostoevsky's great Doubles is Ivan

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4 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 347.
5 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 314.

Karamazov, a true Karamazov, but a rationalizing one. "In him is expressed most fully the philosophical development of the split personality."[6] He returns to the great struggle of man with God suggested by Terentyev. In his questionings he reveals to us Dostoevsky's own search for faith. "His (Dostoevsky's) intense interest in the theme must have grown out of a realization of the dualism in his own nature, and the large part it plays in his creative process was perhaps both a conscious and subconscious reflection of this fact."[7]

Having developed the Double, Dostoevsky next proceeded to break this character type up into its most prominent constituent elements and to analyze each separately. The result of this division was the emergence of the Meek, in whom the element of submissiveness predominates, and the Self-Willed, in whom the element of pride, linked with criminality, predominates. The Double and the Meek became well-developed types in Dostoevsky's first literary period; while the Self-Willed or criminal type was only vaguely suggested in these early works and awaited the tragic experiences of the katorga for its full expression. This Self-Willed type is merely an extension of the Double in which the meek elements are entirely suppressed and the desire for evil, even to criminality, is overwhelmingly magnified. The criminals, Orlov and Petrov, in The House of the Dead, fur-

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6 Ibid., p. 355. 7 Ibid., p. 316.

nished Dostoevsky with his first models of this type. His earlist creation along these lines is Prince Valkovski[8] in The Insulted and Injured. He is completely egocentric and anti-social and himself believes that in these respects he is merely representative of the whole race of man. His philosophy presents no positive aspects, but is simply a negation of all the values which men have held dear. His hatred for society is not instinctive but deeply reasoned. His attitude becomes a matter of principle with him. He is utterly repulsive and cynically wallows in the feelings of disgust which he rouses in others. In his self-satisfied confession to Ivan Petrovitch, he says: "You needn't wonder at my valuing convention, keeping up certain traditions, struggling for influence; I see, of course, that I'm living in a worthless world; but meanwhile, its snug there and I back it up, and show I stand firm for it, though I'd be the first to leave it if occasion arose."[9]

Svidrigailov in Crime and Punishment is another example of this same extreme type. However, here Dostoevsky has handled the character with greater artistry by including a much more comprehensible motivation, and by bringing his actions to the conclusion which is the only logical outcome of his stand--suicide, for the self-willed man rebels against

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8 Simmons, op. cit., p. 117.

9 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Insulted and Injured, p.247.

God and seeks to deny God. At last he sees the solution of his problem. By taking death into his own hands, by suicide, he feels that he is denying the power of God over life and death; he is becoming a man-God. Thus the Self-Willed or man-God stands in direct opposition to the Meek, who, at the final resolution of Dostoevsky's philosophy, emerges as the reincarnation of the God-man.

Of the later representatives of the Self-Willed type Verhovensky in The Possessed is perhaps the most interesting. Another representative of the intellectual Self-Willed type, he differs from Valkovski in that while he hates society just as intensely as the latter, yet he goes beyond the merely negative attitude and presents a definite social solution. The Utopia which he paints realizes all the vices which the Russian Monk later refuted; it imposes equality by reducing man to the brute level and by equalizing all men in degradation. This solution is the obvious answer of the anti-social, egocentric, self-willed type. "His ideas on freedom and equality amount to the destruction of society in the name of his own personality."[10]

The one other type which Dostoevsky evolved and carefully analyzed was the Meek. This character appeared on the scene soon after the Double and is likewise a product of the first literary period. Here the ambivalence of the Double is resolved in a direction opposite to that in the

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10 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 293.

Self-Willed nature, as the submissive elements are brought to the fore. "Although Dostoevski's finest characters, the Doubles, reflect the mental struggle of his own split personality, his heart went out to his Meek creations, whose spirituality and goodness are expressed not through ratiocination, but through an outpouring of moral spirit."[11] This statement is applicable, however, to the final development of the Meek as seen in Myshkin, Zossima, and Alyosha Karamozov, those figures in whom submissiveness and loving humility become in some measure an expression of power, rather than to the first examples of this type.

Vasya Shumkov, the hero of A Faint Heart, is the earliest distinctive representative of this type. This is the story of a poor and obsequious clerk who struggles quietly along overburdened by a sense of subservience and attention to duty. At last he falls in love and, in the joy of his emotional enthusiasm, he neglects his work as a copyist. The papers fall due and he is late, cannot possibly finish on time. He is crushed; he feels that he has now denied himself the right to his proposed good fortune. He smiles meekly and sets himself to write. Night and day he pushes a dry pen across empty pages.

"How, how has it happened? What has sent him out of his mind?" ask the gaping fellow-workers, and the only answer which his friend Arkady can give is gratitude. "The

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11 Ibid., p. 388.

point was: that Vasya had not carried out his obligations, that Vasya felt guilty in his own eyes, felt that he was ungrateful to destiny, that Vasya was crushed, overwhelmed by happiness and thought himself unworthy of it; that, in fact, he was simply trying to find an excuse to go off his head on that point."[12]

Many of the fundamental characteristics of the Meek are already present in this brief sketch. Vasya has no dualism whatsoever, no will to protest even. He regards his semi-enslaved condition as normal, his outstanding quality is gratitude; he is grateful even for the oppression of Yulian Mastakovitch, his employer. In the end he is destroyed passively, without a struggle; more as Arkady Ivanovitch points out he has even been seeking misfortune as his due.

This characterization presents the Meek as the world's underdog. He rouses our sympathy and perhaps even liking but that is all. He actually gives little hint of the great succession of Meek figures which followed. The next one to be conceived in the same vein was Emelyan Ilyitch in The Honest Thief. If anything, this character is weaker than the first. He is simply a drunkard and a beggar who readily accepts the world's judgment on his worthlessness, but who has neither the will nor the power to lift himself above his degradation. He is utterly abject and submissive.

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12 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: A Faint Heart, p. 188. White Nights and Other Stories.

Rebuked by his tailor-benefactor for his uselessness, he takes up needle and thread and with weakened, bleary eyes and nervous, tremulous hands attempts to set himself to sew.[13] His only actual act, the kleptomaniacal theft of the breeches, leads him to such pangs of remorse for ingratitude that at last like his predecessor, Vasya, he worries himself into illness and finally death. His special trait of drunkenness does, of course, set Emelyan apart from the other Meek characters, but in the other respects he is as fully typical of the Meek at this early stage as is Vasya Shumkov.

With the character of Rostanev in The Friend of the Family, we find a much nearer approach to the more highly spiritualized and sensitized meek genre of the Idiot. There is still the clear resemblance to the humble Vasya, but now this submissiveness is found in a man who has attained a certain position in society. His qualities of passivity and forbearance affect the lives of those about him and attract their love and respect. Although this character is conceived in a comic vein, the very description of Rostanov suggests Myshkin in several respects. "His soul was as pure as a child's. He was a perfect child at forty, open-hearted in the extreme, always good-humored, imagining everybody an angel, blaming himself for other people's shortcomings, and exaggerating the good qualities of others, even pre-supposing

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13 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Honest Thief, p. 278. The Short Stories of Dostoevsky.

them where they could not possibly exist."[14] In summing up the characteristics of this man Dostoevsky points ahead to the frailties and potentialities to be found in Myshkin:

> "Of course, he was weak, and indeed he was of too soft a disposition, but it was not from lack of will, but from the fear of wounding, of behaving cruelly, from excess of respect for others and for mankind in general."[15]

The presentation of Rostanev also serves to illustrate another important point in Dostoevsky's fictional method. Despite his many unusual traits, Rostanev does not appear unrealistic. By centering his attention on the character's thoughts and feelings, the author has minimized the importance of external reality and has given us instead a satisfying internal reality--a very necessary approach in developing the highly idealized Meek type of the later novels.

The Insulted and Injured offers for study a new aspect of the Meek. Vanya (Ivan Petrovitch), the hero, presents the reaction of the Meek in love, an aspect of this type which was developed at greater length in Crime and Punishment and The Idiot. In the circumstances of his life Vanya closely reflects Dostoevsky's own early days as a Petersburg student and littérateur and his reaction to the emotional difficulties of his own first courtship and marriage. As in the earlier story, White Nights, we find the hero, acting under the impulse of a uniquely self-sacrificing love,

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14 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Friend of the Family, p.12.

15 Ibid., p. 12.

not only stepping aside for another but actually encouraging and aiding the other's suit. This peculiarly selfless love which developes sympathy in opposition to sensuality in the lover is a particular trait of the idealized and spiritualized Meek which is to be found throughout Dostoevsky's fiction. A typical expression of this emotion is found in the words of the dreamer-hero of White Nights, who, although he might better be classed as a Double than a Meek type, has, nevertheless, a strong tendency toward the mystical self-abasing aspects of the Meek. Speaking of the nature of his feeling for the heroine, he says: "I would love you so that even if you still loved him, even if you went on loving the man I don't know, you would never feel that my love was a burden to you."[16] This response is in the same intense vein of complete submission and humility in which Vanya offers to carry the love letters between his betrothed, Natasha, and her new infatuation, Alyosha.[17]

Vanya was followed by the last of the Meek to precede the embodiment of the virtues of the Christ-image--Sonia Marmeladova. Like Myshkin, Sonia, too, moves amid a world of sin but remains utterly pure and unsoiled. She is completely repressed and humble. Added to these qualities is a religious fatalism which forestalls any rebellion on her part against the ugly and unjust circumstances of her life.

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16 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: White Nights, p. 43.

17 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Insulted and Injured, p.35.

In her resigned acceptance of suffering as necessary and of value, we have a reflection of Dostoevsky's "own doctrine of earning one's happiness by suffering."[18] Her role as a prostitute merely serves to impress upon her her own lowliness. Despite the nature of Raskolnikov's crime, she still considers herself immeasureably beneath him. Thus her love for him finds expression only in complete self-abnegation and submission. Actually love is a dubious term to apply to a relationship of this nature. In substance it is far closer to the spirit of lovingkindness which Father Zossima advocates which will lead man to love his fellows even in their sin and suffering. It is an earthly semblance of Divine love. Dostoevsky was aware of this and consciously aimed in this direction, always seeking to place the emphasis on the spiritualizing, compassionating elements involved, rather than on the element of passion. Throughout his notes we find him reminding himself that "there must be no word of love between them, that is the sine qua non of this relationship."[19]

Sonia's reaction to Raskolnikov's confession of his crime is typical of the selfless, undemanding quality of her feeling. There is the first momentary, uncomprehending terror of the immensity of the sin against God, and then the sweeping wave of sympathy, of overwhelming compas-

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18 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 172.

19 Ibid., p. 174.

sion. Her thought is only for his suffering--"what have you done to yourself!"[20] This utter loss of self finds expression in her final act of accompanying him to Siberia--without a word being spoken, "but both knew that it would be so."

The deeply religious and mystical nature of Sonia is another important element of the later Meek. For her, faith in God is her only sustaining hope ("if there were no God, what would I be!"). It is an absolute and completely unquestioning belief. Perhaps the most memorable illustration of this is to be found in the famous scene of the reading of the miracle of Lazarus:

> " . . . a feeling of immense triumph came over her. Her voice rang out like a bell; triumph and joy gave it power. The lines danced before her eyes, but she knew what she was reading by heart."[21]

In the nature of her fundamental acceptance of religious teaching and of her pitch of religious ecstasy, Sonia again foreshadows the doctrines of the Elder Zossima.

Strangely enough, however, if we consider Dostoevsky's own growth in religious faith, Sonia was permitted to succeed just where the Christ-man was later to fail; so that Crime and Punishment ends on a note of hope; whereas The Idiot, conceived in hope, ends in futility and nothingness. As the years of Siberia begin, Raskolnikov realizes at last the infinite joys of the new life which awaits him, but, characteristically, it is to be a new life which will cost

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20 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: Crime and Punishment, p. 371.
21 Ibid., p. 298.

"great striving, great suffering." In this respect Sonia serves as a far stronger illustration of Zossima's doctrine of the saving power of humble love than does Prince Myshkin.

Sonia anticipated Myshkin. It is she, not Aglaia nor Nastasya, who is the spiritual sister who would have completely understood his intuitively comprehending and compassionating, but childlike, nature.

The last words of Crime and Punishment speak of a new story, the story of the "gradual renewal of a man--of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."[22] This idea later developed into a great plan "for the artistic treatment of the ultimate salvation of a civilization at war with itself."[23] The whole plan was never fully developed, but the next full-length novel, The Idiot, was the initial step. Here the Meek emerges as the Christ-man, the embodiment of those virtues of love and humility which will eventually lead to the Golden Age and the salvation of mankind. In The Idiot, however, this figure stands alone amid a world of proud, conflicting passions. He brings a radiance but he is yet doomed to failure.

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22 Ibid., p. 493.

23 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 199.

Chapter IV

The Embodiment of Loving Humility--Prince Myshkin

With the closing pages of Crime and Punishment we see the beginnings of Dostoevsky's great faith and hope in meekness and humility as a power of saving grace. Sonia through humble love has brought the sinner to repentance; in these two at least God's truth has been fulfilled. Without judgment, without reproach, she has taken his sin upon herself, for she has long felt that she is "just such a criminal as the man standing before her,"[1] so she has served him in silence and in humility, never losing hope. Raskolnikov, the internally raging Double, has at last brought the self-willed elements of his nature into submission. That Dostoevsky himself felt this spiritual regeneration to be a difficult artistic problem, and perhaps somewhat beyond his powers, would seem to be indicated by the fact that it is at this point that he concludes the novel.

Had Dostoevsky permitted his own doubts to prevail, his next work would have been the most bitterly hopeless of his career. Instead, "he wanted to show the positive, to express the unconditional. Yes, not indeed by some roundabout route, but directly; goodness, simple and complete, goodness which cannot be corrupted, goodness not the outcome of

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1 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Brothers Karamazov, p.385.

deliberation but spontaneous as crime; that is, truth, simple and complete, the childlike impulse; above all, beauty, simple and complete, beauty without aestheticism, without examples."[2]

This ideal of spiritual beauty was to find expression in the works which followed. In the first of the novels of this group Dostoevsky adopted the new point of view and attempted to portray a "truly beautiful soul." Yet it is an interesting fact that this character, who appears in the novel as the greatest of the typical Meek, began in the first draft as one of the most self-willed of Dostoevsky's creations. As was frequently the case with him, he conceived the basic elements of the plot of The Idiot from the newspaper accounts of a sensational trial in which a fifteen-year old girl, who had suffered outstanding cruelties and indignities at the hands of her parents for several years, was accused of attempting to burn down the family homestead. In connection with this theme, all traces of which soon disappeared in the early drafts of the novel, Dostoevsky began outlining a character designated only as the Idiot. This original figure of the Idiot had little in common with Prince Myshkin as he appears in the novel. The first description of the Idiot brings him much closer to the Rogozhin-like type of character than to Myshkin. "He is described as a powerful

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2 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 146.

proud, and passionate individual. There is something Byronic about him, and he resembles those criminal, self-willed creations Valkovski and Svidrigailov. He is sensual, performs extravagant actions, and perhaps his most marked trait is egotism."[3] This minor character resembles the later hero only in his idiocy (a term not here to be defined in the modern psychological sense), nervous ailments, and epilepsy. The Christ-like figure who appears in the book does not emerge until the end of the seventh draft. In the third plan we have the first hint of this when Dostoevsky observes of his original Idiot: "He ends with a Heavenly deed;" in the fourth draft a Son, meek, charming in his simplicity, generous, and noble, is introduced. In the sixth plan this character begins to be merged with the Idiot, so that the resulting figure now appears as one of Dostoevsky's great Doubles, but with the self-willed elements still dominant. It is in the next plan that this characterization is pushed one step further and the Double becomes the Meek. This final evolution of the Idiot cleared Dostoevsky's hesitations and in the next draft he proceededrapidly and smoothly; the Idiot had become the embodiment of the Christ-image.

Dostoevsky's evident uncertainty and doubt in working out the broad basic lines of ths plot would seem to indicate a certain evident confusion in his own thinking at

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3 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 202.

this time. The novel was written during one of the latter trips abroad at a time shortly following the death of his daughter Sonia. Not only was the novelist strongly affected by this loss, but his lengthy absence from Russia, which he loved passionately, had begun to fill him with an intense longing for his homeland which he translated into a comparison of East and West, greatly to the discredit of the West. In the radicalism now vividly apparent in Russia he saw a reflection of what he now considered to be the destructive influence of the West. His present thinking led him to take a stand directly opposed to his early socialistic views. "To achieve the brotherhood of man by decree and to legislate universal equality now seemed to him a monstrous fallacy."[4] He realized that there existed a great lack of faith, but he himself was as yet uncertain as to the true nature of this faith. Thus, the main theme developed from a deeply felt spiritual anguish. Dostoevsky sought for the answers to this problem in the teachings inculcated by Russian Orthodoxy. The result of this is that there is a certain amount of didacticism, including a stern refutation of both the religion and the social philosophy of the West, present in this novel. However, this theme, while it is rather obviously "dragged in," is not sufficiently emphasized to ruin the artistic unity of the book as a whole.

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4 Simmons, op. cit., p. 196.

The Idiot is an excellent example of Dostoevsky's approach to the novel technique through what Meier-Graefe calls the novel-drama form, a very loosely-constructed form. In essence it breaks down into a series of large and dramatically effective scenes, although this does not prevent a continuous flow of narrative. Thus, perhaps, the best method of developing the plot here would be to follow Meier-Graefe's[5] division of the material into acts and scenes.

The opening of the first act plunges us into the midst of the story immediately. In the railway carriage speeding toward Petersburg are gathered three strangers, three principals of the cast: Myshkin, Rogozhin, Lebedyev. A light conversation on the weather quickly assumes a most self-revelatory tone on the part of all three. In a few moments most of the main characters have been presented to view either directly or indirectly through the conversation and the main lines of the intrigue have been drawn. The drama of endless passions is begun.

The scene at the Epanchin's prepares us more fully for many of the later actions of Prince Myshkin. Here Dostoevsky develops to a large extent the concept which he evolved at the close of the seventh draft of the novel; the Idiot prince relates his adventures among the children. With simple naiveté Myshkin tells of the children who surrounded

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5 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevski--The Man and His Work, p. 155.

his days of illness and exile in Switzerland with the warmth of their love and who at last wept so bitterly and so futilely when it was necessary that "Léon s'en va pour toujours." The story of Myshkin's relationship with Marie is related--a love of the Meek for the Meek--a love which so strongly developed the element of sympathy as opposed to passion. And amid people long used to social convention and worldly values, Myshkin's sincerity and radiant naiveté win for him not ridicule but comprehending affection. This childlike quality so essential to an understanding of the Prince is best manifested in the dual natures of Madame Epanchin and of her youngest daughter, Aglaia. Realizing the simple purity of his spirit, Aglaia quickly responds and makes of him her confidant. Myshkin thus becomes intimately a part of the minor intrigues revolving about Ganya Ivolgin and the two women, Aglaia and Nastasya. This in some measure prepares us for the strange and highly dramatic scenes of the remainder of the act.

In a certain sense the events at the Ivolgins and at the birthday party are but a continuation of one scene. Here is the famous auctioning of Nastasya, the lavish prelude to the silent six months of torture and madness in Moscow. It is only the Idiot, himself pure and impervious to sensualistic impulse, who is capable intuitively of comprehending the true nature of this magnificent, but madly bewildered, beauty. Overwhelmed by compassion he interposes, revealing

her own nature to her with startling insight and truth:

> "You are proud, Nastasya Filipovna, but perhaps you are so unhappy as really to think yourself to blame. You want a lot of looking after, Nastasya Filipovna. I will look after you. I saw your portrait this morning and I felt as though I recognized a face that I knew. I felt as though you had called to me already. . . . I shall respect you all my life, Nastasya Filipovna."[6]

But she, at once drawn and terrified by the brilliance of his purity, clings to her familiar niche among the insulted and injured, and, although revolted by Rogozhin, she rushes off with this man of the underground den in a frantic and self-sacrificing effort to save Myshkin. This brings to an end the first act.

The happenings in Moscow, where Myshkin follows Rogozhin and Nastasya Filipovna, are related only in a hazy fashion from behin the scenes. All the action here revolves about and is motivated by Nastasya. A true Double, she is torn by conflicting desires and passions and can arrive at no set course. It is to be understood that Myshkin in his own mind in no way sees himself as Rogozhin's rival; he finds in his own feelings for her merely an expression of compassion for the sufferer. But she, unable to resolve her duality, at length flees from both. The actual beginning of this act comes in the first real news we receive from Moscow, the letter to Aglaia which precedes Myshkin's return.

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6 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 159.

The following scenes between the Prince and Rogozhin in the dim vault-like chambers of the latter's home in Petersburg may be said to reveal the Idiot at his weakest. Before the burning passion of Rogozhin the passive goodness of Myshkin is powerless. Although the interview closes with a nominal victory for Myshkin in the exchange of crosses and the giving of the blessing, even Myshkin realizes that the other is still unsatisfied and that danger is imminent. Parting from his brother-in-the-cross, Myshkin, in an almost semi-dazed condition, wanders about Petersburg, drawn by an inexplicable desire to see Nastasya, beset by fear of an approaching epileptic fit and filled with premonitory doubts and apprehensions regarding Rogozhin. At last, rebuking himself for what he considers to be his sinful thoughts, but, nevertheless, fully conscious of Rogozhin's watchful presence, he returns to his hotel. On the staircase, knife in hand, Rogozhin awaits him. Suddenly there is the momentary blinding light, the insight into universal harmony; then all is destroyed as the epileptic fit seizes its victim. Thus early in the story the reader is made aware of the coming dissolution and disintegration.

The next act moves the scene rapidly to the Lebedyev villa at Pavlovsk, where Myshkin has been brought to recover his strength. Here, amid the peace and beauty of a suburban resort, the demoniacal element is forgotten, and we have the semblance of an idyllic romance introduced.

That this can never be more than an unfulfilled hint, however, must be apparent at once when we consider the nature of the characters involved: Aglaia, the double with a predominating self-willed element, and Myshkin, the epileptic, the meek idiot, the "blessed innocent." Suddenly, against this backdrop, Dostoevsky thrusts one of the most disunifying and unrelated elements of the entire story--the orgy of blackmail surrounding the hitherto completely unheralded appearance of the illegitimate "Son of Pavlishtchev." Although this scene on the verandah gives Myshkin a chance to appear in a strongly positive light as essentially the Christ-man, so that at length the enemy is softened and, succumbing to the influence of humble love, says repentantly: "We are all ridiculously good-natured people;"[7] yet it would also seem that Dostoevsky eagerly seized upon this scene as a chance to sum up the sarcastic innuendos against nihilism which are scattered throughout the book, to display such individuals in an utterly ridiculous light, and to give vent to some of his own biased feelings regarding socialism. As the act closes with a flashback to the original theme of love and hate, we have in the reappearance of Nastasya Filipovna a bold suggestion of the recurrence of the demoniacal element.

The fourth act readily splits into two parts and an

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7 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 272.

interlude. The first part presents an interesting study of the nihilist, Ippolit Terentyev, one of Dostoevsky's minor, but important, Doubles. This whole section is centered about the reading of his Explanation and his sincere, but abortive, suicide attempt. Here for the first time Dostoevsky lifts man's dualism to the level of the great struggle between man and God. There is the basic human will to believe pitted against the rationalistic lack of faith. ". . .And yet in spite of all my desire to do it, I could never conceive of there being no future life, no Providence."[8] The height of cynical frankness, the Explanation is, indeed, an egoistic, exhibition of phenominal feebleness, but as Prince Myshkin so clearly devined the basic motivation here was not spite or bitterness but merely an intense desire to be loved, a want which Ippolit's cynicism could not prevent from finding expression:

> "What is there for me in this beauty when, every minute, every second I am obliged, forced, to recognize that even the tiny fly, buzzing in the sunlight beside me, has its share in the banquet and the chorus, knows its place, loves it and is happy; and I alone am an outcast, and only my cowardice has made me refuse to realize it till now."[9]

Here again the connection between the parts is loose, slight and somewhat forced. The rendez-vous between Aglaia and Myshkin which follows this reading returns to the love

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8 Ibid., p. 394.

9 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 393.

theme of the preceding act but, while its final result is the tentative betrothal of the pair, its deeper implications serve to illumine the basic impossibility of such a union, for Aglaia is of this earth, whereas Myshkin, not even comprehending the nature of her passion, seeks only spiritual union. Thus, at the parting both are unenlightened.

The interlude which follows, while it revolves about the affairs of one of the lesser personages, General Ivolgin, also ties in with the Myshkin-Aglaia episode. Through the connivings of Lebedyev the long-suggested, frenzied letters of Nastasya to Aglaia are revealed. The reading of these letters leads to one of the most symbolic and Christ-like pictures in the book--the meeting of Nastasya and Myshkin, the repentant Magdalene at the feet of the Christ-man.

The last part of this act is in a manner a direct result of the early morning interview between Aglaia and Myshkin. The hesitations regarding their marriage have been at least partially resolved; the stage is now set for the Prince's introduction to society. The soirée at which Myshkin, suddenly carried out of character by the impulsation of an overshadowing epileptic fit, almost reaches his most positive heights, ends in frustration, when, with the crashing fragments of the vase, the Prince, too, falls back to earthly reality and at last relapses in an epileptic fit.

The fifth act opens with the meeting of the rivals, Aglaia, who is determined enough to love him against the

theme of the preceding act, while it is that result in the
evocative betrothal of the pair, his reason implacable
serve to liquidate the entire impossibility of such a union,
for Julia is of such caution, whether Tybalt, not even has
prohibiting the nature of her passion, seems only spiritual
union. Thus, of the parting both are unmistakeable.

The Indenture which follows, while it revolves
about the affairs of one of the lesser personages, Jaquenetta
Tybalt, also sins in which the Tybalt-Julia episode.
through the conference of Jaquenetta the Ione-Antonio, Tyb-
also letters of Antonio to Julia are revealed. The results
of these letters leads to one of the most symbolic and Sinist-
like elements in the book--the meeting of Antonio and Tybalt
the transient Benvolio as the last of the Shield-man.

The last part of this act is in a manner a direct
result of the early meeting between Julia and
Antonio. The deeds have repeated their martyrs have been
a lesser material motives the so we is not see for the
Tybalt's Introduction to Antonio. The motives of Tybalt Jaquenetta
equally certain act of disorder by the Introduction of an
overmachine epilogue the plot reaches its most creative
moments, and in Tybalt-Ione, Mono, with the dreaming Tyb-
meets of the year, the finance too, failed been to satisfy
reality and at least response to an epilogue it.

The first act opens with the meeting of the rivals,
Antonio, who is determined enough to love Julia against the

world, but not understanding enough to comprehend the unearthly nature of the emotion which permits him to love both at once, and Nastasya, who, faced by a woman she both loves and hates, succumbs to the stronger self-willed elements in her own nature and forces the Prince to that fatal moment of hesitation. Thus, in a certain sense, neither woman is a foil for the other. Both are cast in the same mold. Each in her rival's role would have acted exactly as did her rival.

Nastasya after her brief triumph once more comes to fear the evil result of her influence on Myshkin and, in another attempt at self-effacement, flees from him to Rogozhin on their wedding day. The last scene brings the book to a close in an atmosphere of complete hopelessness and frustration. These three are now gathered together within the dark tomb of Rogozhin's home. Nastasya at last lies dead at the hand of her passionate, sensualistic lover. The brothers-in-the-cross, Rogozhin, the murderer overwhelmed by his crazed hyper-sensitive fancies, and Myshkin, once more a true idiot, lie down together. However, the "ending was not determined exclusively by the theme but rather by the renunciation of the poet who had not yet reached maturity."[10]

Throughout the pages of this novel moves one of the most unusual figures in literature. "In no work of Dostoevsky's does the image of the hero so entirely embody the idea of

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10 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 194.

the novel as in The Idiot. In fact, Prince Myshkin and the idea he represents are completely identified, one with the other."[11] That the Idiot was created in response to the search for an ideal image is obvious, and, as is here illustrated, the essential quality of an ideal is that is is always unattainable. The questions that arise then in any study of this figure created after the poet's own heart are: What was the original ideal toward which Dostoevsky was striving? What is the nature of this character as we now have him? and, In how far does he achieve the positive values which Dostoevsky sought to attain?

In a letter to his niece written at about this time Dostoevsky says: "The chief idea of the novel is to portray the positively good man. . . . There is only one positively good man in the world--Christ. . . . I recall that of the good figures in Christian literature, the most perfect is Don Quixote. But he is good only because at the same time he is ridiculous. . . . One feels compassion for the ridiculous man who does not know his own worth as a good man, and consequently sympathy is invoked in the reader."[12] However, in the figure of Myshkin there is nothing of this sort; he is conceived in a tragic vein of great poetic beauty. Yet, at the same time Dostoevsky himself draws the parallel between his own creation and the great comic figures of liter-

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11 Simmons, Ernest J.: Dostoevski--The Making of a Novelist, p. 209.
12 Simmons, op. cit., p. 210.

ature: Cervantes' Don Quixote, Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, and Dickens' Mr. Pickwick. The reference to Don Quixote, a favorite among Russian readers, is made especially pointed throughout the novel, both in the passage on Myshkin's letter to Aglaia and in the extended use made of the ballad of The Poor Knight, Pushkin's poem on Don Quixote. Still, it is to be noted that the differences, resulting from the author's view of the figure, between Myshkin and these earlier attempts to portray a perfectly good man are more obvious than are the similarities.

There are other sources also apparent in the conception of the Idiot. One of these is the popular folklore figure of the inspired idiot. Not only among the peasants, but in all classes of Russian life was this afflicted being looked upon as a special messenger of God, as one possessing a deeply spiritual nature, as one peculiarly loved and compensated by God. The most important source upon which Dostoevsky drew, however, is the figure of Christ as he is pictured by the Russian Orthodox Church. This is seen immediately in the opening pages of the book. The description of Myshkin bears many of the features of the Christ-image as it appears in Eastern churches. The Prince is "a young man, twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, above the average in heights, with very fair thick hair, with sunken cheeks and a thin, pointed, almost white beard. His eyes were large, blue and dreamy; there was something gentle, though heavy-

looking in their expression."[13] More than this, Myshkin has the essential quality of Christ, "the only one which can be portrayed, a thing which hitherto seemed unportrayable: beauty of heart."[14] The entire picture of Myshkin's life among the children in Switzerland is merely a vitalizing of Jesus' precept: Suffer the little children and forbid them not, to come unto me, for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven. So Myshkin, too, sees in the children the presence of both infinite innocence and infinte comprehension. In this he sees the child's essential nearness to God and his capacity for bringing comfort to others through this nearness, for the soul is healed by being with children."[15]

The parallel between Christ and Myshkin is carried one step further in the relation of the incident of the Mary taken in sin who is not to be looked upon as guilty but only as unhappy. The downfall and repentance of Nastasya is another more elaborated variation upon the same theme. It is not, however, merely in these individual instances that the Christ-parallel is evident, it is in every action of the Idiot, in every personal contact, however brief, that we see the influence of a radiant and magnetically attractive personality which draws to itself all sinners and sufferers.

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13 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 3.

14 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 148.

15 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 62.

Rogozhin, Ganya Ivolgin, Ippolit Terentyev--all men who desire to hate the Prince, are, nevertheless, instinctively attracted to rely upon his goodness and purity.

In order that this morally perfect figure be made palatable and vital to the reader it was necessary that there be mingled with the exaltation and virtue of the saint the cracks and flaws of the earthly being, the frailties of the simpleton. So that in reality Myshkin becomes one of the weakest and most imperfect of God's creation. Dostoevsky's choice of this particular affliction no doubt arose from the fact that modern standards have frequently given a peculiar twist to the meaning of the word, intellect, so that it has come to be accepted as that "form of reasoning especially adapted to the struggle for existence and to the exploitation of one's neighbor."[16] Such an intellect would, of course, be incompatible with the spiritual beauty of the Christ-man. Thus his two outstanding flaws are epilepsy and idiocy, thereby imposing a temporary limitation on the intellect. Drawing upon his own experience with the disease of epilepsy, Dostoevsky devoted his attention to a study of the psychological, not clinical, aspects of this illness. It is perhaps an indication of Dostoevsky's religious confusion and doubt, however, that Myshkin attains to a vision of highest harmony only at those moments when the oncoming

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16 Meier-Graefe, Julius: Dostoevsky--The Man and His Work, p. 148.

epileptic attack leaves him most powerless. The peculiar nature of his desease, moreover, plays an important role in providing plausible reasons for Myshkin's social innocence and untainted attitude. The juxtaposition of these traits results in a character necessarily incompatible with the modern materialistic and ego-centric spirit, and thus one who, in a certain sense, must fail in the world.

There is one other important feature to be considered in the make-up of Myshkin's personality, that is his place among the typical meek characters. Here is one of the very few cases in which we have a Meek type emerging as the hero of a novel. Myshkin possesses many of the most prominent characteristics of the earlier Meek. This is seen especially in his attitude toward suffering and misfortune. He raises no protest against the social limitations and barriers which his idiocy sets up; he frankly admits and accepts his own frailties in the eyes of others; yet there is no inclination toward self-pity on these grounds. This burden he humbly accepts as natural and just. More, he even seeks further suffering, that he may be better able to give to others compassion and love and thus in some measure relieve them of their hurt. Seeing the passionate Rogozhin ablaze with the desire to do evil, to murder, Myshkin is overwhelmed by loving sympathy for him. He wishes that he too might sin, might take the other's burden upon himself and thus lead Rogozhin back to God in the spirit of true repent-

ance; so that at last Rogozhin, too, may walk in the light.

In all this acceptance and submission there is an impregnating atmosphere of mysticism and fatalism. There is no will to protest against God's justice, rather, as in the case of the fatal soirée, the Prince is more frightened and depressed by his foreknowledge of events, than by any factors within the happenings themselves. This same element of fatalism enters into all his relationship with Nastasya Filipovna. Her last action on the wedding day wakens no sense of surprise or reproach. He knew always that it would be so, that she would return to Rogozhin and that Rogozhin would kill her. It is for this reason that Myshkin finally allows himself to be destroyed without a struggle.

Then, too, Myshkin's response to love is merely the typical response of the Meek. For passion he can return only gratitude and sympathy. His love is a sexless self-abnegation which demands nothing in return. Thus, it is possible for him to love two at once, and yet to feel no division within himself. Berdyaev's interpretation of Myshkin on this point is both interesting and enlightening. He views the Prince's love as a demonstration of self-will for it is beyond what is allowable to man; it is compassion carried to the point at which it becomes diseased and destructive.[17] In actuality Myshkin cannot even comprehend the

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17 Berdyaev, Nicholas: Dostoievsky--An Interpretation, p. 119.

searing passions which burn Rogozhin, Nastasya, and Aglaia. The breakdown of the story comes as a result of the expression of overwhelming sympathy. The terrible moment of hesitation at the meeting of the rivals which so completely alienates Aglaia is but a moment of completely powerless compassion.

In many respects, however, Prince Myshkin goes far beyond the conventional Meek type. Like Father Zossima, earlier discussed, he is a thinking person with deep personal convictions; unlike the Elder, however, his convictions are not based upon his own experience of life, but are rather, intuitive. Presenting his views as simple, basic truths, Myshkin here acts in large measure as a mouthpiece for Dostoevsky's didacticism and in this respect he inartistically steps out of character. His gullibility, his self-condemnation, and his tendency to rationalize evil in others relate him to the early Meek, while his eager love for his fellow-man, his ecstatic joy in nature, and his exemplification of passive goodness and of the virtues of love and humility make him an anticipatory embodiment of Dostoevsky's final philosophy. Yet it would seem that Dostoevsky himself fully realized all his weaknesses, for in the end the word of the world in judgment upon him is: "You see for yourself what he is, a sick man."[18]

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18 Dostoevsky, Fyodor: The Idiot, p. 528.

The pervading spirit of The Idiot is the influence of a radiant personality, but unlike Christ, his goodness is passive. He moves amid a world of sin and hopeless passion, touching all with light, and rousing in others a reawakening desire for purity; yet, despite this, he does no more than to confound and blight the lives which he touches. All finally disintegrates in death, futility, and madness. He moves through life a vital symbol of the doctrine of the power of loving humility which Dostoevsky preached in The Russian Monk, yet he but serves to illustrate that humble love is not "marvelously strong" but terrifyingly weak. Thus, the books ends on a negative and doubtful note. Did Dostoevsky mean Myshkin's failure to symbolize and repeat Christ's earthly failure and spiritual success, or, was it, as his later works would seem to indicate, an inability on the part of the poet himself to give complete faith to his own ideal? Judging from Dostoevsky's own later comments regarding his faith there is a slight possibility that he may have attached this symbolic meaning, but, considering his later novels, it seems that while he may have strongly felt the value of passive goodness and meekness, yet he was, nevertheless, earthy enough to feel that his thesis was somewhat untenable.

Conclusions

After a brief but characteristic period of falling away from the strict religious teachings of his childhood home, Dostoevsky, as a result of his years of Siberian imprisonment, underwent a period of spiritual submission and self-abnegation which at last resulted in a renewal of faith. Dostoevsky left Siberia once more on the road toward belief in Russian Orthodoxy, a tendency which his later sojournings in western Europe served to strengthen. In connection with his renewed faith in Orthodoxy came the beginnings of a strong Russian nationalism and an unswerving faith in the autocratic Czarist government. Even while still in the katorga he had already written to his brother, Mihail, expressing his sincere gratitude to the Czar Alexander for indirectly bringing about this spiritual resurrection. This was the beginning of Dostoevsky's philosophy of salvation through suffering and sincere repentance, the concept to which he sought to give artistic expression in his writings. Yet, despite Dostoevsky's attempts to convince himself of his belief in his own hypothesis, his actual success in bringing his rational faculties to submit to his mystical religious leanings is uncertain, for throughout his works, even to the very last, we find continual doubts expressed, doubts regarding this very problem of the injustices of suffering.

When Dostoevsky at the end of his career, wrote the

conversations and exhortations of Father Zossima, he felt that he had achieved for himself a clear and steadfast faith, a faith evolved through reason and strong against doubts. The extent to which he has actually succeeded in giving these views a strong artistic presentation is somewhat questionable. His is on the whole a philosophy of fatalistic submission and passivity which might lead to complete inaction and the nullification of progress. Basically a philosophy of compassion and love, it is at the same time a stern dialectic which emphasizes freedom of the will with its entailing possibility of evil and the value of suffering and sincere repentance as a spiritualizing and elevating experience. Like all idealized concepts it is by its very nature of non-resistance somewhat untenable in a highly materialistic and commercialistic world, however. The teachings are directly based upon the passive concept of goodness inculcated by the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is simply a literal interpretation of the Gospel teachings of Christ applied to the everyday activities of life. The solution which it offers of "turn the other cheek" and "resist not him who is evil" is mingled in Dostoevsky's philosophy with Russian messianism, with hope in the humble peasant as the springboard of salvation. This resulted, of course, in a strong nationalism evidences of which are only too obvious in Dostoevsky's biased thinking.

The religious dialectic which took final shape in

the words of Zossima had been shadowed forth in many of the preceding works, however. As early as the short story, A Faint Heart, Dostoevsky was already interested in the character whose outstanding trait is meekness. In the first examples of this type of character, Vasya Shumkov and Emelyan Ilyitch, we find merely certain of the most obvious characteristics illustrated, an eternal sense of gratitude regardless of what misfortune the world may send, an absolute lack of dualism, so that there is no will whatsoever to protest against harsh circumstance, and, the final result of this combination of traits, an almost self-sought suffering and destruction. Colonel Rostanev of The Friend of the Family is sufficiently kin to these folk to be considered a typical Meek. However, he does step markedly out of character in his aberrational moment of self-assertion. As soon as Foma Fomitch has been expelled through the unopened glass door, however, there is a swift return to character in an attitude of overwhelming repentance and self-reproach. But in judging this representative of the Meek we must remember that the character development here is limited by the demands of Comedy.

Vanya and Sonia Marmeladowa introduce the selfless response of the Meek to love. The latter carries the earlier fatalism of acceptance of suffering to its highest point of complete abnegation of any expression of self, so that in her utter devotion to the needs of another, in her self-denial and humility she becomes the "spiritual sister" of Myshkin,

and in her surrender of self to the fervour of religious ecstasy she anticipates Zossima. Thus, this prostitute from amont the "insulted and injured" is in reality one of the most positive of Dostoevsky's artistic creations. In her own person she exemplifies the Meek who see salvation in suffering.

Perhaps the most vitalized expression of Dostoevsky's idealized philosophy of love and humility is to be found in the figure of Prince Myshkin. Drawing upon a then current criminal trial for his original plan, Dostoevsky conceived a story woven about an intensely dualistic girl and a sensualistic, self-willed Idiot. Only traces of this plot are found in the novel which finally appeared, however, an indication of Dostoevsky's own dualistic creative approach, for the Idiot prince as he is developed in this melodramatic novel of warring passions, The Idiot, becomes an embodiment of the Christ-image as conceived in accordance with the passive concept of goodness of the Eastern Church. Myshkin is not a reasoned Meek, as is the later Zossima but an instinctively good man. In attempting to present perfection Dostoevsky foresaw and made provision for the artistic dangers involved in this creation. Myshkin, enfeebled in body and mind, almost incapable of any positive action, is himself one of the weakest of God's creatures, but at the same time by the radiant force of a spiritually beautiful and magnetically attractive personality, he becomes a positive, though passive, force for good in the lives of others. His failings are

perhaps as much an indication of the author's own realization of the frailties of his philosophy as a necessary artistic limitation in presenting a morally perfect figure without making him appear either distasteful, ridiculous, or unrealistic to the reader. The result, however, is a novel which ends in futility and disintegration and which illustrates the weakness, not strength, of Dostoevsky's religious philosophy of the power of humble love. As he was planning the novel Dostoevsky did, of course, consider the possibility of several so-called "happy endings," but the Prince's nature is such that this type of conclusion would merely have left an impression of impending disaster and would, therefore, have been no more positive. With Myshkin's failure all disintegrates: there is not even a faint light of future hope in the closing pages. It appears that the Idiot must be regarded as the product of a mind as yet uncertain, as yet still searching for faith. The great and positive expression of a strong and powerful faith, the epic of sin and regeneration, The Life of a Great Sinner, Dostoevsky never accomplished. This "hosanna of faith" is merely foreshadowed in the brief pages of The Russian Monk.

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An Abstract of a Thesis

Dostoevsky's Development of the Character
of Prince Myshkin, Hero of The Idiot

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Abstract

Throughout his life Dostoevsky was searching for a credo which might aid him in resolving his doubts. Because of this we find indications of his developing religious philosophy expressed continually in his works. There had been the strong influence of Russian Orthodoxy in the boy's early family life, but as he grew older this sensitive, delicate child grew more and more introverted. The result was that during his student days at Petrograd, he was led to seek fellowship in books rather than in his school companions. The particular readings which he chose brought him under the influence of the French school of humanistic socialism, so that it is believed that later as a young littérateur he was quite ready to go one step further and to accept the atheistic socialistic views of the radical Petrashevsky group. In a strongly autocratic country like Czarist Russia this, of course, led to his arrest and imprisonment. The years spent in Siberia did not constitute a period of stagnation, however, but were an extremely important influence on Dostoevsky's thinking and writing. It was there that the "sacred disease" of epilepsy developed; there that he was able to gain such insight into character complexities from a study of his fellow prisoners; and, most important of all, there that his spiritual regeneration began. Following his return to Russia from imprisonment, money difficulties soon

drove him into Western Europe for a period of self-enforced exile from Russia. During this sojourn abroad all that was most Russian in his nature was most strongly developed. He came to believe in both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the paternalistic, autocratic Czarist régime as the most perfect forms of church and state. This resulted in certain bigoted views of both western Catholicism and western humanism which left their stamp upon all his later work.

In the last and greatest of his novels, The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky gives in Book VI, The Russian Monk, what he considered to be his most positive statement of his religio-philosophic dialectic. Since his views are in essence those of the Russian Orthodox Church, they are presented through the conversations of a Russian Elder, Zossima. While this technique of presentation imposed a certain limitation upon Dostoevsky's development of his own ideas, it is, nevertheless, an important factor in lending an air of innocent wisdom and tenability to views which are somewhat divorced from earthly reality. Starting with a view of man as an immortal being of absolute value, Dostoevsky preached the concept of freedom of the spirit as the most priceless, though terrible, of gifts. This freedom, of course, obviates the possibility of evil, and, therefore, of injustice in the world. While the poet himself never completely resolved the problem of injustice even in his own thinking, he did, nevertheless, arrive at a philosophy hav-

ing as its central theme the belief in the power of humble love and submissiveness as a force for world salvation. In this view, of course, suffering, which teaches man submission and humility, takes on a place of paramount value.

The Elder Zossima, through whose lips Dostoevsky develops the points of his dialectic, is one of the greatest of this author's Meek characters. Unlike the earlier representatives of this type he is one whose philosophy of submission is reasoned, based upon actual experience of life, for the early career of Zossima depicts him as a powerfully dualistic individual. This division of characters into types according to their predominating traits of duality, self-will, or meekness, while it does not deny the complexity of man's nature, does permit much closer character analysis than is otherwise possible. The first of these types to be developed was the Double, most realistic and truest to life. As Dostoevsky studies him he becomes more and more a schizophrenic possessing two completely unreconcilable natures. The best-known representatives of this type in its varying aspects include Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment and the brothers, Ivan and Dmitri in The Brothers Karamazov. Most of Dostoevsky's women, torn by conflicting storms of love and hate, also fall into this group.

This dualism may be resolved by the predominance of any one of the elements of the Double. During his years in Siberia Dostoevsky came into close contact with a crim-

inal type of individual which led him to recognize the possibility of a strong self-willed element completely motivating the actions of a character. This self-willed man, seen in Valkovski, Svidrigailov, and Verhovensky, seeks only the gratification of his own desires. This leads him finally to a man-God philosophy of which the logical conclusion is suicide, or the attempt to assert self-definition by depriving God of the power of life and death over man. At the same time Dostoevsky's own idealism, which at last found expression in the conversations of Father Zossima led him to develop a character type in which the elements of submission and humility are dominant. In the early stages this character is merely the world's rejected; in the later development, as represented by Sonia Marmeladova, for example, it becomes a positive force for goodness in the world. The philosophy of the Meek, as opposed to that of the Self-Willed, is one of utter submission and resignation to the will and spirit of God.

Perhaps the most outstanding embodiment of this spirit of loving humility which Dostoevsky presented is the figure of Prince Myshkin, hero of The Idiot. In the creation of this highly spiritualized character there are evidences of Dostoevsky's own dualism, for Myshkin first took form as a Self-Willed, rather than a Meek Character. The book was written at a time when the author, self-exiled from his homeland, was losing the last vestiges of his faith in socialistic humanism and was turning once more to the teachings of

Russian Orthodoxy. Thus, the Prince was conceived in accordance with the passive view of goodness inculcated by this Church. The story, which ends in a torrent of futility, while highly complex and involved with regard to the windings of plot and subplot, is essentially a passion-torn tale revolving about the emotionally twisted relationships of four people: Aglaia, Nastasya, Rogozhin, and Myshkin. Throughout the book moves the figure of the Idiot Prince, actually outside of the circle of warring passions and yet, at the same time, the central motivating force in the lives of all the others. Myshkin, the intuitively good man, has many literary predecessors. Unlike the earlier truly good, however (Don Quixote, Dr. Pangloss, Mr. Pickwick), Myshkin is presented in a tragic, not comic, vein. Some of the spiritualizing elements of his nature were drawn from the folklore figure of the inspired Idiot, but the most important influence in forming the character of Myshkin is the traditional figure of the gentle Christ. Mingled with the aspects of the saint, there are the limitations of the idiot. In his attitude toward sin and suffering, and in his utter self-abnegation and submission of the will, Myshkin also embodies the characteristics of the typical Meek.

He appears both as Dostoevsky's spokesman and as the embodiment of his philosophy, but, in a world of earthly values, he fails to make manifest the power of the thesis of loving humility.

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